



MONTANA CENTENNIAL FARM AND RANCH PROGRAM

Testimony on SB 204

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In 1909, the US Congress passed the Enlarged Homestead Act, which expanded the size of homestead claims from 160 to 320 acres. This Act opened the gateway for hopeful farmers and ranchers to come to Montana and put down agricultural roots. The homesteading boom that followed changed the face of Montana forever. One hundred years later, we come to you, the State Legislature and State of Montana, to say please join with us in honoring that history, and the history of others whose families came before.

Today is our national inaugural day, and it reminds us all that each and every one of us is part of history, that we carry history with us, and that remembering our history is one of the most lasting gifts we can make to future generations. The Montana Centennial Farm and Ranch Program seeks to celebrate the agricultural traditions of our state by preserving the histories that represent the perseverance and stewardship of Montana families on their farms and ranches.

This is a new program of partnership that brings heritage and history institutions together with Montana's farming and ranching groups in keeping this history alive. Through this program, the state's Montana Historical Society will join the Montana Preservation Alliance, the Montana Farmer's Union, the Montana Stockgrowers and other agricultural producers to acknowledge the strength and determination of agricultural families, recognize their contributions to our state and help to preserve their traditions.

Many states across the nation honor the Centennial Farms and Ranches in their jurisdiction, and this is Montana's opportunity to do likewise by sanctioning this program and putting the weight of your historical institution behind it. The MT Historical Society will write the rules and so will shape the ultimate program, but we envision the following:

- Appreciation & certificate for 100-year old family operations
- Collecting the history and archiving it for future generations and scholars
- Recognition for historic buildings still standing
- An important partnership program focused upon agricultural history in our state

Beyond this, MPA would hope to acquire grants that would enable us to work toward some ways to share the centennial histories. Understanding the tight fiscal climate, we are committed to playing a major role. Montana Preservation Alliance will take the lead in the programmatic work, in research and in working with the partners and families. And we will take a lead in fundraising to ensure program success, and hopefully to grow the program into the future. We would not make this offer without some confidence that we could find funds for the project.

Having spent the past seven years researching and photographing Montana's historic barns for an upcoming book with the MHS Press, we know this is important. One source of inspiration for this new proposal is the Montana Sons & Daughters of Pioneers organization, that back in the 1800s realized the importance of collecting the memoirs and histories of the early settlers to Montana and housing that at the MT Historical Society. It is one of the Society's most popular collections today, and only exists thanks to the foresight of those who established this registry and historical memoir collection more than 100 years ago.

And so we invite you to join us in a broad Centennial Farm and Ranch Program, and extend your appreciation to rural families for their contributions to our State's heritage. We encourage a do pass on this bill and ask for your whole hearted support of this program that honors Montana history.